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SUBJECT: UN SECURITY UPDATE FOR NORTH DARFUR

REF: KHARTOUM 2133

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: UNDSS highlighted ongoing SAF operations in areas to the north and southwest of El Fasher. It estimated the overall security environment in those areas as unpredictable, and advised humanitarian agencies to exercise caution when operating in those particular locales. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) In its regular weekly security briefing on September 14, UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) highlighted several recent clashes between Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and rebel troops in areas to the north and southwest of El Fasher. The incidents include:

-- September 11: National Redemption Front (NRF) forces defeat SAF in Um Sidir and retake the village. SAF elements were witnessed retreating south to safehavens in Mellit, Kutum, and Kafod. UNDSS did not provide comment on the amount of equipment captured by the NRF or the number of victims, though it noted rumors of "possibly hundreds" of SAF casualties. (Note: In press reporting, NRF field commander Malik Adam Tyrab claimed that they seized sixteen vehicles mounted with anti-aircraft guns, DShK heavy machine guns, and other light armaments. Tyrab held that fighting resulted in only a small number of NRF wounded, while there were a number of SAF troops killed. End Note.)

-- September 11-13: Following its defeat at Um Sidir, the SAF began a bombing campaign focused on Um Sidir, Hashaba North, and other surrounding villages. (Note: ARC officer and other observers have noted steady re-supply and military flight activity at the El Fasher airport, with most Antonov bombers heading north. It remains unclear if bombing continued into the morning of September 14. End Note.)

-- September 13: UNDSS reported an unconfirmed SAF attack on the villages of Dobi-al-Umda and Dobi-al-Madrassa, both located southwest of El Fasher and east of Jebel Mara. UNDSS remarked on reports of new NRF bases in the area, which would be the likely reason for the military action. (Note: ARC officer notes that in conversations with AMIS and UN officials, and in press reporting, a common assessment is that the SAF is seeking to cut off the north-south avenue of approach west of El Fasher. SAF efforts may be aimed at hampering NRF attempts to organize a new front by linking up with SLA-Abdel Wahid Deputy Senior Commander Mohammed Adam Abdul el-Salam (also known as "Terada") south and southwest of Tawila. End Note.)

-- September 13: UNDSS reported that additional troop reinforcements were sighted in El Fasher, including 40 vehicles - both technicals and troop transport trucks - and up to 1,000 soldiers. (Note: It is unclear whether these are additional troops providing reinforcement or if these forces have already been in theatre and are only being repositioned. Sightings of substantial, heavily-armed military convoys and aerial activity have been common since late August. On the margins, UNDSS further reported receiving news of battalion-sized elements deploying from Khartoum airport to

Darfur on September 13. End note.)

-- September 13: An unconfirmed attack was carried out by Janjaweed on the "Rwanda" internally displaced persons (IDP) camp near Tawila, UNDSS reported. No further details were available, though UNDSS assessed that this was a relatively small and isolated incident. (Note: In its September 13 situation report, AMIS stated: "MGS Tawilla reported that at about 122240C Sep 06, ten (10) armed men suspected to be Janjaweed entered the Tawilla IDP Camp and at gun point forcefully took animals belonging to the IDPs. Some of the IDPs managed to sneak out and inform the MGS. The protection force personnel were tasked to intervene and stop the act. On arrival at the scene of the incident the gunmen had already left and the protection force followed the tracks of the gun men in the direction of Um Jalbalkh. On sighting the PF personnel the armed men opened fire and the PF returned fire killing one of the gunmen and wounding another." End note.)

13. (SBU) In a sidebar with ARC officer, UNDSS mentioned that the precise situation in the eastern Jebel Mara remains unclear. There have been unsubstantiated reports of a parallel SAF offensive aimed at dislodging SLA-Abdel Wahid fighters and other "anti-DPA forces" in the region. (Note: A UNDSS security update reported severe clashes on September 10 "when SAF ground forces, including artillery, entered the Turba area, which is under control of SLA/Abdel Wahid. The next day fighting declined but intensified again on September 12 when SAF reportedly bombed the area. It is alleged that one Abdel Wahid rebel was killed and six others injured. Fighting has also been reported in the area of Katur village, 15 kilometers southwest of Sabun. National Security Director in Nyala confirmed the fighting in the above mentioned areas, involving SAF and NRF forces." UNDSS opined that "SAF casualties are not available but believed to be high since the GoS has requested additional staff in order to increase the capacity of

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the medical personnel at the military hospital at Nyala. On September 12, more than 20 persons were evacuated to the military hospital at Nyala. The fighting might be the beginning of the recently reported new (5-prong) SAF offensive operation south of Tawila." End Note.)

14. (SBU) COMMENT: Some UNDSS and AMIS officials speculate that the SAF is seeking to exploit rifts in the rebel movements by further dividing them and taking advantage of their military weakness. The NRF's capture of Um Sidir indicates that it still has sufficient capability and organization to mount effective counter-attacks. Continued SAF troop and materiel reinforcements flowing into El Fasher suggest that the Government will continue offensive operations in North Darfur and the Jebel Mara for the near future, with negative repercussions for humanitarian access and ordinary Darfurians. El Fasher and the 30 - 40 kilometer zone surrounding the town remain calm.

15. (SBU) COMMENT CONTINUED: Gaining a clearer picture of SAF operations and intentions will remain difficult with virtually no active AMIS patrolling in areas of contention and with continued GNU obstruction of Ceasefire Commission efforts to carry out investigations. (Comment: A CFC participant informed ARC officer on September 13 that the SAF CFC representative rejected a CFC proposal to investigate fighting near Tawila. End Comment.) Fuel shortages in El Fasher - exacerbated by the GNU's withholding of petrol reserves - is further degrading AMIS' ability to operate (Reftel Khartoum 2113.) Additionally, several AMIS personnel have alleged to ARC officer that the SAF continues to surreptitiously confiscate fuel from AMIS tankers at the El Fasher airfield, which closes after 1800 and is under the complete control of Sudanese authorities impeding the African Union force's ability to maneuver and carry out its mission. END COMMENT.

POWERS

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